

3. ISRAEL IS EXTREMELY GLOOMY ABOUT AFGHANISTAN.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan has increasingly absorbed the Israelis' attention until it is now the dominant front-page news item. Giving a "foreign" news story such attention is most unusual in Israel.

A single theme emerges strikingly from the Israeli analysis: a blatant Soviet drive toward the Persian Gulf has begun. The stakes are high -- control of oil resources are absolutely vital to economies of the West. In the Israeli view, the Kremlin's actions in Afghanistan also serve other Soviet interests, the most important being a reduction of the threat of the Islamic revivalist movement both on the Soviet borders and within the USSR. The action in Afghanistan is an exhibition of Soviet will and American weakness. Access to warm water ports is a traditional Russian preoccupation, as is interest in increasing political influence in South Asia with the ultimate objective of achieving Soviet hegemony over the entire area.

In Israeli thinking the ultimate main goal is Moscow's interest in exercising control over Persian Gulf oil. It is academic as to whether the Soviet drive for Persian Gulf oil is motivated by the depletion of its own oil resources or is simply the reflection of its own expansionism. The fundamental point made repeatedly by Israelis is that "a fateful struggle" has been joined. The Soviet move into Afghanistan has come even closer to closing the noose around the ultimate objectives, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Having already established heavy influence at the choke point of South Yemen, they are now in a good position to promote effectively the emergence of "revolutionary" regimes in Iran and the Persian Gulf, thereby gaining control of the bulk of Middle East oil.

There is widespread concern in Israel that the US will be slow to draw the obvious conclusions and take the appropriate response. Coming on the heels of the Iranian crisis, Israelis are concerned that the US may be unable, if not unwilling, to react forcefully to blatant provocation. The Soviets have demonstrated that bold use of conventional force remains an effective tool in the nuclear age.

The Israelis also conclude that the danger to world peace lies elsewhere in the Middle East; America's preoccupation with the Palestine question to the exclusion of more important problems has damaged America's own vital interests. The US must recognize the nature of the true threat to regional stability and to world peace. If this means a US military presence in the Middle East or even direct US military intervention in the area, so be it.

The Israeli view is stark

Former Prime Minister Rabin, in a recent newspaper article, put the Israeli view simply: "The Russians now pose the greatest danger to Israel's future."